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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SANTO DOMINGO 001094

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [ASEC](#) [DR](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REACTION TO HAITI CRISIS

REF: STATE 37364

Classified By: DCM LISA KUBISKE FOR REASONS 1.5 (B/D)

11. (SBU) Dominicans are apprehensive about the unraveling of Haiti, defensive about possible overflow onto their territory, and unwilling to take in any quantity of refugees. Reactions in the Dominican Republic to the unraveling of neighbor Haiti are mixed. The GODR has reinforced the border with its best troops, but even these are few and far between.

The local press headlines Haiti daily, upstaging the presidential election campaign here. The GODR continues to lay responsibility for action on the international community. The Senate has unanimously declared that "Haitian problems should be resolved in Haiti" and has called on the GODR not to accept Haitian refugees. Embassy on February 20 delivered reftel demarche to military and MFA officials, emphasizing the need to prevent Dominican territory from being used by persons seeking to oust President Aristide by violence.

12. (C) There are now 500-600 Dominican troops assigned to the northern border close to rebel-held areas of Haiti, more than the usual 300-350. On February 20 when defense attache (DATT) delivered reftel demarche, Secretary of the Armed Forces LTG Jose Soto Jimenez replied that the Dominican military would do whatever necessary to maintain control of the border. He expressed concern that, if rebels take control of Cap Haitien as he expects, then Port au Prince would be threatened. DATT cautioned Soto that human rights abuses would be unacceptable. Soto Jimenez said that if the OAS or CARICOM put together an international stabilization force, the GODR might consider sending troops into Haiti, but only as part of a multinational effort.

13. (SBU) On February 18 Deputy Foreign Minister Miguel Pichardo observed to Charge that throughout the Mejia administration the GODR has tried to alert the international community about Haiti. The Dominican Republic wants to avoid the disintegration of the Haitian government. Pichardo said an international force should work with Haitian authorities and restore order.

14. (SBU) "The Armed Forces assure us that they are in control of the border; events have disrupted cross border trade and informal markets." He said there is no indication of any refugee flows. He said the GODR does not favor establishment of refugee camps on its side of the border. He informed us that the Dominican ambassador and staff continue to work in Port au Prince, reporting daily. Regarding opposition fighter Guy Philippe, Pichardo said the military told the Ministry that Philippe had crossed the border without arms or any fighting force.

15. (SBU) On February 19 the Foreign Relations Secretariat, Directorate of Migration and Armed Forces jointly announced that repatriations of undocumented Haitians would be suspended temporarily. This was in response to increasing violence in the Haitian border town of Juana Mendez, where rebels occupied and set fire to a police station. According to Director of Migration Miguel Vasquez, up until the decision to suspend, 3,500 - 4,000 Haitians had been repatriated in 2004; the military listed 3,148 repatriations as of February 16. Tensions on the border have escalated since two Dominican soldiers were killed on February 14 -- by Haitians, according to a Dominican legislator from that locality; by Dominican criminals, according to the Armed Forces leadership.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON ALERT

16. (SBU) UNHCR Junior Professional Officer Sandrine Desamours is in daily contact with the Embassy and the Armed Forces operations staff (J3). Desamours told poloffs February 18 that there had been no mass migratory flows. On the contrary, the number of Haitians requesting asylum had declined dramatically over the past three weeks, from 3-4 cases on intake days to virtually none. She said the number of Haitians crossing the border with legal documentation has been steady, most of them entering through Dajabon. From January 1 to February 16, 14,300 Haitians had entered legally and 5,814 had departed. She attributed the dropoff in asylum seekers to increased military deployments on the border. Desamours expressed concern that fewer Haitian women were crossing the border for medical attention, an unusual circumstance, and that five Haitians had requested repatriation since February 5, hoping to return to Haiti to

help overthrow Aristide.

17. (C) Director for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Juan Artola (protect), in daily contact with emboffs, forwarded reports of preparations by armed anti-Aristide groups to attack Haiti's second city Cap Haitien and of GOH concern over having underestimated the rebels' arsenal. Artola says that the GODR views the prospect of a massive influx of Haitians as a security issue and if necessary would eventually order the military to prevent Haitians' entry. MFA Undersecretary for Consular Affairs Wenceslao Guerrero Pou had requested information from him on international norms regarding displaced persons and on what emergency support IOM could provide. Artola said told the MFA he would seek guidance from IOM headquarters in Washington.

18. (SBU) On February 19 Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Project Director Jason Belanger told us the CRS Haiti program officer had been evacuated from Port au Prince. Belanger said that the Red Cross was preparing to assist border communities and that his CRS program officer had traveled to Dajabon to coordinate with that effort. The Red Cross had unconfirmed reports of increased border crossings at night, but no reports of mass migration or expulsions. Belanger believed most Haitian migrants would seek destinations other than the Dominican Republic, given Dominican animosity towards Haitians. With this in mind, CRS is developing contingency plans for directing any mass migration toward Jamaica, Cuba, Bahamas, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

HAITIAN EXPATS ALARMED

19. (C) On February 18 poloffs met with expat Jean Bertin, former Deputy Director of Civil Aviation in Haiti (1991-92), longtime resident here who founded the International Alliance for Recuperation in Haiti (AIRH). Bertin said many Haitians believe Aristide would step down only if the United States intervened to remove him. He lamented that Haitians are consumed with Aristide's departure, not on how to achieve a democratic transition.

110. (C) Bertin asserted that the Dominican and Haitian governments should work together to find a solution, instead of an OAS-brokered agreement. When asked about Guy Philippe's recent return to Haiti, Bertin claimed that he had known of the plan beforehand and that Philippe crossed the border with a dozen men. Bertin warned that opposition groups in Haiti have no vision and are ill-prepared to run the country. Group 184, for example, needed to be "less emotional and more political".

CIVIL SOCIETY CONCERNS

111. (SBU) Executive Director of MUDHA (Movement of Dominican Haitian Women) Sonia Pierre told poloff that the GODR lacks political will to address problems in Haiti or the plight of the many undocumented Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. She considers that the Haitian diaspora here is far more concerned with day-to-day survival than with politics in Haiti. Like other contacts, she doubted mass migration would become a problem.

112. (SBU) Pierre contradicted other reports and asserted that random round-ups of Haitians and darker-skinned Dominicans had increased recently, particularly in the Santo Domingo neighborhoods of Villa Altagracia and Zona Universitaria (where many Haitian construction workers live), Boca Chica, and La Sabana (in Puerto Plata). She said she had complained to the director of Haitian affairs at the Foreign Ministry. She urged the Embassy to continue engaging the GODR on the need for a new migration law to protect Haitian immigrants' rights.

113. (SBU) Executive Director of MOSCTHA (Socio-Cultural Movement of Haitian Workers) Joseph Cherubin claimed to us that the Dominican military and police are doing little to control the border. He reported that on February 16, police stood by while a group of Dominicans beat Haitian laborers in Dajabon to protest the murders of two Dominican soldiers. Cherubin also believes mass migration from Haiti will not occur because many Dominicans are "anti-Haitian".

HAITIAN CONSUL SPEAKS OUT

114. (SBU) Haitian Consul Jean Baptiste said this week that Dominican exporters have stopped transporting merchandise into Haiti because delinquents are grabbing it for themselves. Baptiste also accused rebel Guy Philippe of killing people in Haiti. Baptiste did not say exactly where on the border Philippe had crossed, but insisted he was in Haiti.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

115. (SBU) Violence in Haiti has already disrupted border trade. The Armed Forces chief told us that the border market

in Dajabon remained closed February 20, depressing border commerce and cash incomes on the Dominican side. However, residents in the region still had adequate food supplies. (Many Haitians purchase Dominican agricultural products along the border such as eggs, plaintains, beans and cabbage. After the United States, Haiti is the Dominican Republic's main trading partner. According to the Dominican Republic Center for Exports and Investments (CEI-RD), in 2003 Dominican exports to Haiti amounted to almost USD \$112 million. About 52 per cent of that trade originated in Jimani and 41 per cent in Dajabon.)

GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

16. (SBU) Embassy sources agree that a mass Haitian exodus into the Dominican Republic is unlikely, citing the unstable Dominican economy, lack of jobs and opportunities, uncertainty about the upcoming elections, historical animosity between the two nations, and accusations of Dominican racism. The United States is viewed as the most likely destination for refugees.

17. (SBU) Despite the military's increased presence along the border, the GODR is unprepared for any sudden inflow of refugees. Further significant troop deployments, to the border or as part of a peacekeeping force in Haiti, would require months of training. The GODR also has security concerns at home, including another possible national work stoppage in mid-March, and will be hesitant to draw down its garrisons in the capital.

18. (SBU) The Senate's resolution on Haitian refugees clearly signals that they would not be welcome. The GODR's failure to process more than 200 pending refugee applications from years past, to develop refugee contingency plans, or to press for passage of the stalled migration law -- despite repeated Embassy urging -- are indicative of the general attitude. The Government's announced intent to suspend repatriations of undocumented Haitians is a welcome exception, but it remains to be seen whether random round-ups of sugar workers cease.

19. (SBU) Humanitarian problems could arise as truckers refuse to deliver foodstuffs in the border towns out fear of Haitian vigilantes and hijackers. The situation could also have repercussions in Santo Domingo neighborhoods heavily populated by Haitian construction workers. Given the human rights record of the military and police, we cannot rule out the possibility of human rights abuses. We do not know whether the military is coordinating its contingency plans with civilian authorities including the President.

COMMENT

20. (SBU) Embassy accepts the view, widely held, that Haitians are unlikely to flee in any significant numbers across the land border. A further breakdown in Haiti could send small numbers of determined armed individuals across to seek shelter in the Haitian community here. We see the possibility in such circumstances of increased violence -- not only along the border but also in urban settings. This could include increases in general crime, Haitian-on-Haitian violence, or Dominican attacks on Haitians. The prevalent distrust between the two ethnic/national groups continues and can only be exacerbated by the crisis next door.

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